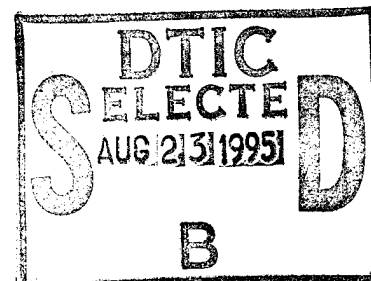


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THE OPERATIONAL ARTIST AS CREATVIE ARTIST

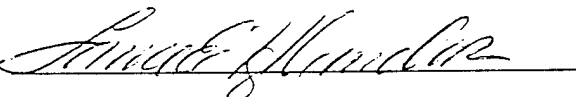
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Lance E. Hylander

LTC, U.S. Army Reserve

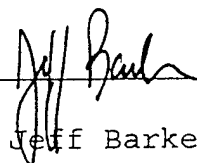
A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

15 March 1996

Paper directed by Captain D. Watson  
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department

  
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16 MAY 1995

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"War is not the business of managers with checklists; it is the art of leaders" NDP-1

This paper examines the process and character of creativity to determine how the military officer, as an operational artist, fits the definition of creative artist. There is an apparent contradiction between the disciplined and structured military officer and the need for that military officer to develop into a creative operational artist. This contradiction deserves scrutiny. This paper also informs all operational artists, CINCs, JTF Commanders and joint planners, about the military officer and the creative process.

It appears that the military must reconcile a severe contradiction between years of past formal military training and the need to develop creative operational artists for the future. The Senior Service Schools are teaching military officers about 'operational art'. To say that military planners are now trained to be artists brings certain expectations. First, an operational artist participates in the creative process. "There is no fundamental difference in the creative process as it is evidenced in painting a picture, composing a symphony, devising new instruments of killing, developing a scientific theory, or

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discovering new procedures in human relationships." <sup>1</sup> An artist is an exponential, divergent thinker capable of creating a brainstorm of ideas in the application of his medium. An artist is one who breaks the molds and traditions of conventional thinking. He becomes a divergent, non conformist who envisions no bounds, and no end to the multiple possibilities of strategy and design. A.H. Maslow, an eminent researcher on the creative process, describes the creative person as a bum, and a bohemian. He describes the characteristics of the creative as "undisciplined, childish, crazy, speculative, emotional and eccentric." <sup>2</sup> The military planner, as an artist, must be creative in the application of his trade called 'operational art'. The expectation is that the military planner, as an operational artist, must share in the characteristics of the creative person and participate in the creative process in his role as operational artist. The military planner then, in order to be the operational artist, must become the divergent thinker who is capable of creating a brainstorm of ideas. He must become a non conformist who envisions no bounds and no end to the multiple possibilities of military strategy and design. He must somehow also assume the characteristics of the crazy, childish eccentric described by Maslow.

In contrast, consider the years of previous training of the military officer. He is taught to conform and to follow the rules and traditions of his service. Military training is conformist and habitual. This training relies upon doing what one is told to do with unquestionable compliance. The culture of military service requires conformity and compliance. The Naval Officer's Guide endorses that "everyone in the Naval service be a good example of subordination, ..." and "in the absence of instruction, the Naval Officer shall act in conformity with the policies and customs of the service." <sup>3</sup> The Marine Corps Officer Guide encourages officers to "get into the habit of being systematic and methodical."<sup>4</sup> The Air Force Officer's Guide also recognizes that officers are subject to a new culture. This culture is the military environment of conformity and similarity. This conformist environment helps produce the discipline necessary for command to operate, especially in the fury and confusion of battle. The question becomes what does this conformist culture do to promote the creativity required for the operational artist.

From the social science perspective, "conformity and similarity with others are necessary ingredients for accurate social perception and communication...however, the problem with

socialization is that conformity easily becomes an all pervasive pattern of life. Such over socialization leads to intolerance and rejection of deviation, and a loss of spontaneity, fascination and experience of personal freedom." <sup>5</sup> The problem for the military becomes that the environment and culture of the military officer often are not conducive to the personal freedom and unrestricted attitude necessary for creative thinking to flourish. The traditionally imbued military officer, in spite of his military background and environment, is faced with the challenge to be creative. He must be an artist who works in creative fashion with operational tools in the medium of land, sea and air forces. He must be an operational artist who can create and paint a canvass of strategic planning that leads to the completion of strategic goals. Many great military genius' in American history have certainly displayed creativity; MacArthur at Inchon, Patton at the Bulge and Chamberlain at Little Round Top. These creative moments were spawned in the heat of battle, outside the context of normal military planning culture and experience. This type of creative experience is addressed later.

Scientists and educators have long studied the creative power of artists. Scientists offer theories about the left and

right sides of the brain in trying to explain the creative power and genius of the artist. The left hemisphere of most people's brains is responsible for the logical thinking processes. The left brain produces information sequentially in an ordered way. The right hemisphere of the brain, on the other hand, specializes in simultaneous processing and it operates in a holistic and relational manner. "For example, a person's learning a mathematical proof might evoke activity in the left hemisphere of his brain, while his conceiving a piece of sculpture might evoke activity in the right side of the brain." <sup>6</sup> To say this another way is that "lawyers, accountants and planners have better developed left hemispheric thinking processes, while artists, sculptors, and perhaps politicians have better developed right hemispheric processes." <sup>7</sup> It is the left brained activity that is logical and sequential and more closely resembles the military response. The intuitive and creative process is associated with the right side of the brain. This left-right brained theory presents a dilemma for strategic level managers in that "the important policy level processes required to manage an organization rely to a considerable extent on the faculties identified with the brains right hemisphere." <sup>8</sup> This right side brain faculty is the creative ability. Vice Chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Owens, visiting the Naval War College, urged Naval War College students to become part of the revolution in thinking in the military. He challenged military officers to be innovative and creative in their approach to solving the military's future problems.<sup>9</sup> This exhortation supports the need for military officers, especially operational artists, to see themselves as artists.

Social scientists struggle with the nature versus nurture controversy that surrounds the study of creativity and artistic ability. "On the one hand there are those who will tell you that a creative genius is entirely due to a lucky accident of a certain unique combination of genes. At the other extreme there are those who say that the primary abilities are generalized, learned habits or skills, produced by certain kinds of practice."<sup>10</sup>

Significant conclusions derived from research on the measures of creativity are that first, creative imagination can be deliberately developed, second, that creative problem-solving courses can measurably improve creative ability, and third, instruction in applied imagination can produce significant gains.<sup>11</sup> Military officers can learn to be creative. Operational artists can learn the skills needed to corral the



power of creativity and produce a structured result and a coordinated synchronized plan molded to support the national military strategy.

Previous military writers on the topic of creativity have recommended improvements in creativity for the military. These suggestions have included adding creative curriculum at service schools, encouraging creative military working climates and performing separate personnel management for identified creative personnel.<sup>12</sup>

Modern social scientists espouse a theory of convergent versus divergent thinking as the two human approaches to problem solving. Guilford calls this the mediational theory of cognition. "We can make a distinction between two basic intellectual processes: convergent thinking and divergent thinking. The one mode (convergent) tends toward retaining the known, learning the predetermined, and conserving what is. The second mode (divergent) tends toward revising the known, exploring the undetermined and constructing what might be."<sup>13</sup>

The convergent thinker is the person who always analyzes, synthesizes and concludes thoughts into neat little mental bundles to store and catalogue. The convergent thinker reduces, abstracts, shrinks and extracts his thoughts and ideas. For the

convergent thinker, multiple external stimuli produce a single response. The military officer is the product of his conformist military training that is consistent with the convergent thinking process.

The divergent thinker, on the other hand, is the 'scatter brain'. He is the generator of thousands of ideas and rampant thoughts, all breaking out in "a great burst of emotion and enthusiasm." <sup>14</sup> Exponential thinking is the character of the divergent thinker. The divergent thinker expands and elaborates ideas and thoughts. A single stimulus elicits many responses.

It is the divergent thinking process that provides the pattern for the creative artist. The sculptor, the painter, the potter, the bronze worker, the poet and song writer are all the result of the right brained, divergent thinker. The military officer and joint strategic planner as operational artist must somehow join the ranks of the creative. He must be able to create and forge multiple solutions to the complex strategic goals and missions of the United States. As a joint military planner, the military officer must now operate in apparent conflict with the years of drill and ceremony. He must now somehow discard previous years of structured military training and discipline and adopt the creative abilities of an artist. To

shed the years of conformity and structured existence in itself is a Herculean feat, but to teach the military officer to be creative in an apparent outright contradiction of his military upbringing is quite another.

Researcher Melvin Tumin has summarized this conflict of the military planner between the habits formed by rote training and the need to be creative. In his essay on creativity he says "Once established, habit yields a comfort and smoothness, which we are loath to give up. The life of the creative, however, demands that in any situation of choice we should at least be tempted by the excitement of the new and untried as well as by the comfort and ease of the habitual." <sup>15</sup> The question is how the operational artist can be excited by the untried and not lured by habits of the past.

Social and psychological theory provides some leads on how to make this seemingly impossible transition. These theories may help to bridge the apparent gap between the comfort of military habit and the excitement of the artistic creative endeavor called 'operational art'.

Jacob Bronowski who has studied and lectured on the creative process says that "a man becomes creative, whether he is an artist or a scientist, when he finds a new unity in the variety

of nature. He does so by finding a likeness between things which were not thought alike before, and this gives him a sense at the same time of richness and understanding. The creative mind is a mind that looks for unexpected likeness." <sup>16</sup> He goes further to say that "we expect artists as well as scientists to be forward looking, to fly in the face of what is established, and to create not what is acceptable but what will become accepted." <sup>17</sup> By this definition we expect the operational artist to seek unity and likeness and to redefine what is acceptable. This seems far apart from traditional military thinking that rewards military officers not for their risk but for their compliance. "By setting up conditions of psychological safety and freedom, we maximize the likelihood of an emergence of constructive creativity."<sup>18</sup> The risk free environment, however, is difficult to create. Tumin points out that "the requisite psychological assurance and safety are desperately hard to come by in a society oriented toward competitive rating for status and reward as marked by external criteria."<sup>19</sup> This competitiveness appears to accurately describe the military culture of the operational artist.

An analogy that might begin to bridge the gap is between the operational artist and the poet. Poetry has been described as

the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, recollected in tranquillity. There is a hint here that the poet, as artist, must recollect and recompose his thoughts in order to write his poetry. The poet is both the creator of powerful ideas and the controller of those same ideas worked through the medium of the written word. This may be a closely analogous definition of creative art that parallels the military operational artist. The artist's mandate then is not only to create multiple and divergent ideas but also to control those ideas through the medium and the tools he uses. Through his professional artistic medium the poet creates a feeling with words, the song writer creates ambiance with his music and the painter creates an insight with colors. The military officer, as operational artist, creates conditions and situations through strategy, design and operational tools to bring strategic objectives to fruition. Operational art could be described as the spontaneous overflow of strategic ideas recounted in an operational plan.

Morris Stein, writing on the creative process provides another insight on the need for control.

"As the creative process proceeds, criticism and evaluation play more significant roles. They give form and substance to ideas....fantasy becomes art only when it is externalized and controlled by the responsible, realistic and logical ego...imagination must submit its work to the scrutiny of the critical faculties."<sup>20</sup>

This analysis leads one to see that there is a necessary place for control in the creative process. The idea is that an artist needs to bring his wellspring of ideas under control somehow in order to make them useful. Theorists concede that "convergent (reduction) thinking undoubtedly also has a role to play in creative work." <sup>21</sup> Here, the theorist is proposing the need for control in the creative process. "Some components of memory, cognition, evaluation and more particularly convergent production...are involved in creative work." <sup>22</sup> The artist must create a wellspring of ideas on one hand and control that same force on the other. A rampage of creative ideas is not art until it is somehow tamed by the tools and techniques of the artist and, through the artist's medium, brought to bear in a deliverable fashion.

Apparently, harnessing and controlling overwhelming creative power is the hidden and unclaimed skill of the artist. He forms order from chaos. He collects all the powerful possibilities and through his medium, reinterprets the natural forces and universal ideas, to give the beholder a new perspective and different view. This harnessing and control are the discipline required of the artist to direct and synchronize his words, his clay, his colors and for the operational artist, his forces. With the channeling

of the power, with the control, ideas are planned and designed for the strategic purpose. There is no wasted diffusion of effort. "Paradoxically, the same creative people who seem so willing to seek out the confusion of the complex and improbable in life also appear to have a strong need for order." <sup>23</sup> There is a need for a conforming power to bring creative ideas under control and to lead to some logical conclusion. Certainly a barrage of wild ideas is worthless without a format and pretext for presentation. Military doctrine advances the principles of war as just such a pretext to provide the important faculty of control to the operational artist.

Control and discipline are not foreign to the military operational artist. The discipline and control that are part of the training and background of the military officer support the operational artist in the creative process. The convergent thought process that produced the conformist military training is the same thought process that provides the military officer with the discipline and control needed to support the creative process. The operational artist's techniques are found in the doctrinal tenets and principles of war that synchronize and leverage his effort.

Psychological researchers also point out that an important concept underlying the creative process is flexibility.

Psychologist, Elaine Donelson explains that:

"To be creative, one must feel free to indulge in the primitive and unconventional, and be open to encounters with the new, unusual and complex. However, creativity is not just a matter of feeling free to indulge in the unconventional thought processes. It requires also the ability to shift between the two modes of functioning generally evidenced as necessary for creativity: the divergent or personalized mode and the convergent or socialized mode, the sophisticated and the primitive, the mature and the immature."<sup>24</sup>

In empirical studies conducted by this same psychologist, it was found that artists were able to shift more easily between convergent and divergent thinking processes. This ability to shift and be flexible in thought modes is another important concept in understanding the creative process as it applies to the operational artist. The concept indicates a need for both the convergent and divergent thinking processes working at the same time within the artist and the ability of the artist to toggle quickly between styles of thought. The hallmark of a military officer's orientation is being prepared for the unknown and unexpected. The military officer can rely on his background and training in agility and flexibility to operate in the creative process. The training of the military officer prepares him for the practice of mental agility and supports the creative



process. Military doctrine also endorses agility and flexibility as important characteristics of the operational artist's plan.

Knowledge and technical proficiency through preparation and prior training are also critical pieces of the creative process of the artist. The written history of artistic genius is plentiful. Life stories of the great figures in history are filled with inspired moments of immense clarity and vision to see the solution and know the way to victory. These inspirational moments are the equivalent of creative 'eureka'. Archimedes in his bathtub, and Newton with the falling apple can be added to the military examples noted earlier. A sudden flash of brilliance brings the solution into clear focus. "Insights do not suddenly appear out of nowhere. They blossom in fields which have been thoroughly prepared by studying the various aspects on the problem." <sup>25</sup> The inspiration of knowing where, when and how to apply the military power of air, land and sea forces can only be the result of study and knowledge. Bringing multiple military forces to bear upon the land, sea and air to produce the exact condition necessary for success is at the heart of military planning. Knowledge of military doctrine and force capabilities provides the context for the operational artist to incubate ideas and produce the illumination. There is no guess work, but there

is knowledge that supports intuition. The design of the operational plan is built and structured piece by piece, fit together in artistic fashion like the architect who draws up the blueprint that produces the next structural wonder. The operational artist builds and designs the operational concepts and strategies to produce the next iteration of the modern military campaign plan. The military officer engages the creative process with a vast reservoir of professional knowledge. This knowledge becomes the foundation of the operational artists' ability to find the intuitive solution. Without the technical knowledge and the years of training and experience, there would be no possible "eureka" for the military operational artist.

Still, there is a tension, a conflict brewing in the military planner who must be creative and controlling at the same time. Donald MacKinnon points out that "there is the necessity in the creative person for what poets have called 'divine discontent' and what Voltaire chose to call 'constructive discontent'." <sup>26</sup> MacKinnon further postulates that "the creative person is the one who in his intellectual endeavors reconciles the opposites of expert knowledge and the childlike wonder of naive and fresh perception". <sup>27</sup> This concept of creativity begins to recognize the idea of internal conflict as a necessary

part of the creative process. Somehow art is the result of a tension in the artist between creative urges and controlling needs. MacKinnon concludes that "in the arts, the great productions appear to be exquisite attempts to resolve an internal turbulence." <sup>28</sup>

The opposing struggle between operational artist as creator and the operational artist as controller produces a tension. This tension is like a force field necessary to power the military planner in his work. James Schlesinger calls this tension a 'disorientation'. He describes creativity in statecraft as springing "from the effort to resolve the intolerable tension between the imperatives of change and the vast pervasive resistance of the psyche and of society." <sup>29</sup>

Maslow describes the process as a 'self actualization'. It is "a fusion of competing forces of being open to the unconscious (creativity) and being closed to (walled off) the conscious forces." <sup>30</sup> This conflict and tension between the structured military past and the creative present is a valuable tension. This unresolved dichotomy is the wellspring of creativity for the operational artist.

The challenge of leadership and the senior service schools is to emphasize the concepts of creativity in order to facilitate

the development from military planner to operational artist. The concepts to emphasize are first, creativity does not happen accidentally. Second, creativity can be taught and needs to be recognized as a valuable commodity in the making of operational artists. The awareness of the creative process is an important and powerful tool for the operational artist. Third, creativity, in any social culture, to include the military, needs a free environment to flourish. The operational artist needs a genuine free environment in which to apply his trade. Fourth, some parts of the military officer's background enhance the creative process. These enhancements are discipline and control needed to guide the creative process; a well-founded base of technical and professional knowledge in which to incubate ideas, and mental flexibility to quickly and freely shift between creative (divergent) and controlling (convergent) thought processes. Last, is the awareness by the operational artist that the creative process is a dichotomy that produces a healthy internal tension. This tension feeds creativity and flourishes in a free environment. Social researcher Calvin Taylor unwittingly described the military situation in his writings

"We need to identify and develop people who can learn the past without taking it too seriously. We need people who can mentally toy with and manipulate man's knowledge and ideas and products of the past, who can use the past as a springboard for the future developments and who can find new leads and do

something with those leads to improve upon the past. In other words, maybe our task is to produce more minds that are 'tomorrow minds' than (are) 'yesterday minds'".<sup>31</sup>

If the military is to develop the "tomorrow minds" it must recognize that knowledge of the creative process is a critical step to becoming an operational artist. The unreconciled opposites of divergent thinker with convergent planner hold the operational artist in the balance. The continued synthesis of these opposing internal learned and unlearned forces are the wellspring of the genius and the 'eureka'. The tension between creativity and control is the productivity of the artist. The operational artist shares in and inherits this dichotomy and productivity. This constant struggle between past and present in the military planner becomes the birthplace of the great phenomenon called 'operational art'.

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- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 102.
- <sup>3</sup> William P. Mack VADM USN (ret), The Naval Officer's Guide, 10th ed. (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD 1991) p. 160.
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- <sup>6</sup> Henry Mintzberg, "Planning on the Left Side and Managing on the Right", Harvard Business Review July-Aug 1976. p.
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- <sup>9</sup> Admiral William A. Owens, USN, Lecture U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 28 April, 1995.
- <sup>10</sup> J.P. Guilford, "Creativity: Its Measurement and Development" Parnes and Harding ed. p. 164.
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- <sup>12</sup> Ronald D. Daniel, Creativity and Strategic Vision: The Key to the Army's Future, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 1993. pp. 19-22.
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- <sup>15</sup> Melvin Tumin, "Obstacles to Creativity", in Parnes and Harding ed. p. 111.
- <sup>16</sup> John D. Roslansky ed. Creativity, (Holland Publishing Co., Amsterdam, 1970), p. 12.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 15.
- <sup>18</sup> Rogers, P. 69.
- <sup>19</sup> Tumin, p. 110.
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- <sup>21</sup> Calvin W. Taylor, "Tentative Description of the Creative Individual" Parnes and Harding ed. p. 179.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.